
THE 1999 FRENCH REPORT ON UFOs AND DEFENSE

EDITED BY MARK RODEGHIER

Editors' note: This article was prepared from several sources, especially information supplied by French researcher Gildas Bourdais, and an interview done by German reporter Haiko Lietz. We thank these individuals for their assistance.

Last year an important study of the UFO phenomenon was published in France, which is just now becoming widely known in the United States, although the ufological literature carried some mention of it at the time. Published in July 1999, the report was entitled *Les Ovni et la Defense: A quoi doit-on se préparer? (UFOs and Defense: What must we be prepared for?)*. This 90-page report is the result of an in-depth study of UFOs over a period of about three years, covering many aspects of the subject, especially questions of how the UFO phenomenon affects the national defense of France and that of other nations.

The study was not an official government project; instead, it was carried out by a committee of individuals who called themselves "Cometa." The majority of committee members had been former "auditors," or participants, in advanced workshops at the Institute of Advanced Studies for National Defense, or IHEDN. Other qualified experts from various fields were also included. There is no exact equivalent to the IHEDN in the United States, although the war colleges of the various services come closest to its function, which is to provide advice to the French military and politicians about defense matters.

The report was initially never intended for public release, and was only given to French President Jacques Chirac and to Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, among other officials. Soon afterwards, at the instigation of a journalist, the report was published and made available to the public. It is hoped that soon it will be available in English to U.S. readers.

Several high-ranking officials endorsed or supported the report. For example, there is a preface by General

Bernard Norlain of the Air Force, former director of IHEDN, and it begins with a preamble by André Lebeau, former president of the National Center for Space Studies (Centre National d'Études Spatiales), or CNES, the French equivalent of NASA.

Cometa was presided over by Ret. General Denis Letty of the Air Force, also a former auditor of IHEDN. The name Cometa, interestingly, was chosen because, first, it is close to the French word for committee (*comité*), and second, it resembles the English word comet, representing something in the sky (just like UFOs). So as General Letty says, the name was a type of pun or game.

The report came as a surprise to both the French public and most ufologists (although there had been advance notice given to officials of the leading U.S. UFO groups at the time that Cometa began its work). Why, people wondered, were former members of the IHEDN willing to write a report about UFOs? And why would high-ranking former French military officers and leading scientists and engineers be willing to author a report that concludes that the extraterrestrial explanation for UFOs is quite possible and can't be ignored? To understand the answer to these questions, we need to consider the history of the French government's UFO program.

THE FORMATION OF GEPAN

The French have always been contrarians in the Western alliance. They have their own nuclear force, a foreign policy that at times has been quite separate from NATO's, and have remained more suspicious of America's actions and motives than either Britain or Germany, the other large and powerful European democracies.

It is fitting, then, that soon after the American Project Blue Book closed at the end of 1969, the French, who had never had much of an organized effort to study UFOs, decided to begin their own project. It would be organized quite differently than any other national UFO project, then or now.

In the mid-1970s, French Minister of Defense Robert Galley had promised that the UFO problem would be

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seriously considered. French national police (the gendarmerie) were asked to collect UFO reports as early as 1974. To assist the government and determine how to handle the UFO problem, a committee of auditors from the IHEDN was charged with the task of writing a report on the prospect of serious UFO studies. Formed in 1976, the committee was chaired by Robert Blanchard, a member of the gendarmerie.

The recommendations of the committee led directly to the formation of the Groupe d'Études des Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non-Identifiés (GEPAN, or the Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena Study Group). GEPAN was formed on May 1, 1977, as a section of the CNES. Although poorly-funded over the past 23 years, it has completed some of the most important physical-trace investigations in UFO history. Unlike Project Blue Book, GEPAN has honestly tried to investigate UFO cases and explain them, or not, based on sound scientific principles. GEPAN is unique among government UFO projects because it was not under military jurisdiction and it issued public, comprehensive reports on its work.

About 10 years ago GEPAN's responsibilities were broadened to include all atmospheric-reentry phenomena, including UFOs, and its name was changed to SEPRA (Service d'Expertise des Phénomènes de Rentrées Atmosphériques).

Thus, IHEDN was involved in the formation of the French government UFO project, and its former auditors twenty years later formed the Cometa to once again study UFOs. That is why the Cometa report and its sponsors fit naturally into the French official tradition of UFO study, even if it was not government sponsored, in this case.

It was this original history of involvement with UFOs that led General Letty to approach the IHEDN when he conceived the idea of another review of UFO studies and the phenomenon. General Letty came to see General Bernard Norlain, director of IHEDN, in March 1995 to discuss his idea of a committee on UFOs. Norlain assured him of his interest and referred him to the Association of Auditors of IHEDN (former members of IHEDN), which in turn gave him its support. As a result, several members of the committee came from the Association.

The next interesting question concerns General Letty's involvement. Why would a former French Air Force general spearhead a study of UFOs?

GENERAL LETTY

In the mid-1960s, Letty was a captain in the French Tactical Air Force at Metz in northeast France. He read about UFO reports at that time, including those collected rather haphazardly by the military. (There was no organized French military project to study UFOs.) The reports intrigued him, so he continued his interest over the years.

Then in 1977 he talked with the pilot of a Mirage IV fighter who had encountered a UFO (the case is included in

the Cometa report). This incident left a deep impression on Letty, as he trusted the pilot's account of the incident since he was the commander of the pilot's squadron and knew him and his capabilities well.

Then shortly afterwards Letty met another fighter pilot named Fartek who, with his wife, had seen a UFO in broad daylight near his home. Fartek observed the object for several minutes and could readily determine that it resembled nothing of terrestrial manufacture.

These reports served to maintain Letty's deep interest in UFOs, but he couldn't pursue it actively while he was in the Air Force. Letty retired in 1989 and went to work for private industry, just like generals do here in the United States. In 1995, he decided that it would be fitting to do another study of UFOs by members of the IHEDN, 20 years after the first review of the phenomenon had been completed. He thus approached General Norlain.

Letty also spoke with André Lebeau, then president of CNES. Letty was very uncertain as to how he would be received by Lebeau, because despite the fact that SEPRA was a part of CNES, SEPRA's UFO role had been minimized. But fortunately, Lebeau agreed with him that the UFO subject needed study, and that it could be done scientifically. Imagine a head of NASA making that statement! From there momentum developed rapidly, and Cometa was formed in early 1996.

THE COMETA REPORT

The main theme of the report is that the accumulation of well-documented observations of UFOs compels us to consider all hypotheses as to the origin of UFOs, but especially the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

In the first section, the report presents some remarkable cases from both France and other countries that demonstrate the strange, unique, and hard-to-explain nature of the UFO phenomenon.

In a second part, they describe the present organization of UFO research, in France and abroad, and discuss studies made by scientists worldwide which may provide partial explanations of the UFO phenomenon, in accordance with known laws of physics. The main explanations for UFOs that have been offered are reviewed, from secret craft to hallucinations to extraterrestrial manifestations.

In a third section, measures to be taken regarding defense are considered, based on sightings by both civilian and military pilots. Strategic, political, and religious consequences, should the extraterrestrial hypothesis be confirmed, are then discussed. It is important to note that no present danger is seen from UFOs, and that the Cometa does not consider UFOs to be hostile.

The report is not highly technical, since it was prepared for government officials. Still, there are discussions of physics and some technical issues. It is suggested that the failure of vehicle engines near UFOs may be explained by microwave radiation. Particle beams, such as proton beams,

which ionize the air and therefore become visible, might explain the observation of truncated luminous beams. Microwaves might explain body paralysis. The idea that UFOs may be propelled by magnetohydrodynamic effects, long an interest of French physicist Jean-Pierre Petit, is seriously considered.

After reviewing the evidence for and against various hypotheses to explain UFO reports, all are found to be lacking, with the most likely (though not proved) being the extraterrestrial hypothesis.

The members of Cometa understand the typical skeptical objection to UFOs as aliens, which is that the distances between stars are too vast for space travel. So they present the ideas of French astronomers Jean-Claude Ribes and Guy Monnet who have developed the idea of very large spaceships, or artificial planets, that can travel for generations until reaching their destination. (This "space island" concept was originally pioneered by American physicist Gerald O'Neill.) These gigantic spaceships may have arrived in our solar system many years ago, and may be hiding in the asteroid belt or somewhere further distant from the sun, sending smaller spacecraft (UFOs) to observe Earth.

DEFENSE IMPLICATIONS

In the third part, the report states that while it is true that no hostile action has been proven yet, at least some acts of intimidation have been recorded in France (the Mirage IV case, for instance). Since the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs cannot be ruled out, it is therefore necessary to study the consequences of that hypothesis at a strategic level, but also as it concerns politics, religion, media, and the public.

The first chapter of this section is devoted to prospective strategies and it begins with fundamental questions: What if UFOs are extraterrestrial? What intentions and what strategy can we deduce from their behavior?

Such questions open a more controversial part of the report, given the identify of the authors. Possible motivations of extraterrestrial visitors are explored here, such as protection of planet Earth against the dangers of nuclear war, suggested for instance by repeatedly flying over nuclear missile sites. The committee then ponders the possible repercussions on the behavior, official or not, of different nations and focuses on the possibility of secret, privileged contacts or information that might have been gleaned by the United States. The attitude of the U.S. is seen as "most strange" since the 1947 wave and the Roswell event. Since that time, a policy of increasing secrecy seems to have been applied, which might be explained by the protection at all costs of military technological superiority to be acquired from the study of UFOs.

It is rather astonishing that not only does the report take the Roswell incident seriously, but the authors come down on the side of the hypothesis that what crashed there was an alien spacecraft, which was recovered by the U.S. government. As General Letty has stated, although there is no

proof for this, Cometa believes that the U.S. authorities know more than they are saying, and that this knowledge is based on what was recovered near Roswell in 1947.

Imagine, if you can, a group of retired American military officers and scientists and engineers including such statements in a report that they send to the President and officials in the Pentagon?

Next, the report tackles the question "What measures must we take now?" At the least, whatever the nature of UFOs, they require "critical vigilance," in particular regarding the risk of "destabilizing manipulations." A kind of "cosmic vigilance" should be maintained to prevent any shocking surprise, erroneous interpretation, and hostile manipulation by the intelligence behind the phenomenon.

Nationally, Cometa urges the strengthening of SEPRA, and recommends the creation of a committee at the highest level of government, entrusted with the development of hypotheses, strategy, and preparation of cooperative agreements with European and other foreign countries. A further step would be for European states and the European Union to undertake diplomatic action with the United States within the framework of political and strategic alliances.

A key question of the report is "What situations must we be prepared for?" It mentions such scenarios as an extraterrestrial move for official contact; discovery of a UFO/alien base on Earth; invasion (deemed improbable) and localized or massive attack; and manipulation or deliberate disinformation aiming at destabilizing other countries.

The report explores the political and religious implications of UFOs, using as a model the perspective of our own exploration of space: How would we do it? How would we handle contacts with less advanced civilizations? Implications for the media and public opinion are not neglected, with the problems of disinformation, fear of ridicule, and manipulation by certain groups reviewed.

In its conclusion, Cometa claims that the physical reality of UFOs, under control of intelligent beings, is a very reasonable conclusion, although not proven. Only one hypothesis takes into account the available data: the hypothesis of extraterrestrial visitors. This hypothesis has far-reaching consequences. The goals of these alleged visitors remain unknown but must be the subject of informed speculation and serious consideration of various scenarios.

In its final recommendations, Cometa stresses again the need to:

1. Inform all decision-makers and persons in positions of responsibility.
2. Reinforce the resources for investigation and study at SEPRA.
3. Consider whether UFOs have been detected by agencies engaged in the surveillance of space.
4. Create a strategic committee at the highest state level of the French government to consider the UFO problem.

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5. Undertake diplomatic action with other nations, perhaps especially the United States, for cooperation on this most important question.
6. Study measures which might be necessary in case of emergencies.

This is quite an agenda, and needless to say, it has not been heeded by French decision-makers, now over one year later. But it may eventually have an impact, in both France and other countries. The Chilean government has recently begun a formal UFO study, and it is not impossible that the Cometa report had a positive influence on that decision.

Admittedly, it is unlikely that the American government will take up the challenge of the UFO phenomenon due to the Cometa report, but it will help those of us seriously interested in the UFO subject to make our case for a scientific study. ♦